THE SPECIAL INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL ON HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS OF POLITICAL/POW PRISONERS IN THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 7-10, 1990
HUNTER COLLEGE
NEW YORK CITY

The Situation of Political/POW Prisoners in the US

Violations of Human Rights

There are political prisoners in the United States! Though the government denies it, this is the shocking reality. More than 100 persons are incarcerated in U.S. prisons for their political actions or beliefs.

The official position is that they are "common criminals," but this conclusion does not stand any serious analysis. To the contrary, the accumulated evidence on each and every one of the cases reveals systematic harassment and persecution of selected persons for opposing the U.S. government and its policies with regard to colonialism, militarism, and social justice.

These persons are known and respected for their long-standing activism in struggles for Native American sovereignty, Black liberation, Puerto Rican independence, and for their struggles against racism, imperialism, women's oppression, and nuclear weapons. They have challenged U.S. policies through a variety of forms, including civil disobedience, armed political actions, and grand jury resistance.

A group of concerned organizations and individuals in the U.S. and Puerto Rico have pledged themselves to bring to the attention of the North American and international communities, the human rights violations which are routinely perpetrated by the U.S. government against these prisoners. They have joined forces to organize consciousness-raising activities on the issue.

The culmination of this process will be a Human Rights Conference whose principal activity is to present evidence to a Special International Tribunal regarding the persistent violations of human rights by the U.S.A. against political/POW prisoners in this country.

The Human Rights Conference and its Special International Tribunal will convene at Hunter College in New York City from December 7-10, 1990. A distinguished panel of international jurists and individuals concerned with human rights, have been invited to participate as judges and pass judgment on evidence presented to them on violations of human rights of political prisoners in the U.S. Already, eight persons have accepted our invitation to be judges: three from Europe and one each from Africa, the far east, Latin America, the middle east, and North America.

The evidence will be principally testimonial and will include representations from Black/New Afrikans, Indigenous Americans, Mexicans, North American anti-imperialist and anti-war advocates, and Puerto Ricans.

A group of experts will be called to testify on prison conditions in general, on Marion Prison in Illinois, and prison control units in particular. Other experts will testify on the political bias of disproportionate sentencing; treatment of prisoners, including the psychological effects of isolation; violations of trial procedures; and the international legal basis of prisoners' behavior in furthering of their struggles. Additionally, a group of former political prisoners have been invited to address the Tribunal. Finally, written and video-graphic documentation submitted by the prisoners will also be made available to the panel of judges.

On Friday and Saturday, December 7th and 8th, evidence will be presented to the judges. A selected program of cultural activities has been organized for the public during the lunch recesses and evenings. The conference proceedings as well as the cultural activities will take place at the Hunter College Playhouse.

On Sunday, December 9th, the panel will meet in an executive session, closed to the public, to deliberate and prepare their statement on findings and remedies. A multi-cultural program of activities and workshops will be available to the audience, also at the Playhouse.

On Monday, December 10th, International Human Rights Day, the statement prepared by the panel of judges will be made public at a press conference. It will take place at the Hunter College Solarium, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

The Special International Tribunal will be attended by national and international human rights organizations. Already, fifteen international organizations from Africa, Asia, Europe, and South America have confirmed their attendance. The diplomatic corps accredited in Washington will be invited as well as members of the United Nations, members of the U.S. Congress, grassroots organizations, and individuals and organizations concerned with human rights in the United States.

What will happen after the Tribunal? It was conceived as one stage of a dynamic campaign aimed at obtaining the liberation of all political prisoners and prisoners of war. The statement prepared by the judges will be published and circulated to members of the U.S. Congress, United Nations Missions and Observers in New York, and international and national human rights organizations. It is expected that it will become a basic instrument for promoting a frank discussion on human rights within civic groups in the U.S. Additionally, the final declaration will be the basis for representations on behalf of the prisoners at the U.N. Commission on Human Rights at Geneva, the Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and the International Conference on Human Rights to take place in Moscow in 1991. Finally, the proceedings of the Tribunal will be published in book form.

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